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WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

MAY 25-29, 1914

FIRST GENERAL SESSION

(Monday evening, May 25)

The first session of the 36th annual meeting of the American Library Association was called to order by the President on Monday evening, May 25, 1914, at Continental Memorial Hall.

President ANDERSON: Ladies and Gentlemen: It is my pleasant duty to declare that the first session of the 36th annual conference of the American Library Association is now open. It is 33 years since we have had a full conference in Washington, the 4th conference having been held here in 1881 and part of one in 1892. It is certainly high time we should meet here again.

We will now have a word of greeting from the Librarian of Congress, Dr. Putnam.

GREETING FROM THE LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS

In deciding to meet in Washington the Association has departed from a practice. But if so, it has helped to uphold a tradition. Its practice has been to consider invitations from various competing localities, and to select among them. But Washington issued no invitation, in the conventional sense. Its tradition is against such a course—logic also. For Washington, being the national capital, is no mere "locality"; still less can it be a "competing" locality. It is the political residence of every association national in scope and representation. It is your residence; as, in a converse way, the home of every subject is the residence of his sovereign. When the sovereign chooses to visit it, he merely announces the visit. And when he comes, he sits at the head of the table. An invitation from the subject to him—as from Washington to you—would be an impertinence.

All of which need not obscure the satisfaction which those of us whose work is resident here feel in your decision for the visit; or our hearty desire to cooperate in whatever may promote the efficiency and enjoyment of the conference. There is sometimes a complaint — however tempered by acknowledgments—that the host-city in providing for the enjoyment of your members has somewhat impaired the efficiency of your program. There will be no such grievance here; for, as you have noticed, the week has been kept clear of entertainments merely social. There were temptations. And if we have resisted them, we beg you to believe that we did so out of consideration for the true welfare of your meeting. For we know that, in itself and for what it means, Washington holds enough to engage your attention and energies without the distraction of social diversions which might be duplicated anywhere.

As respects subjects of professional study, it lacks some which you would find in a great metropolis. Yet among its libraries is a public library which is, I believe, as enterprising and as busy as any of its type and means. Its librarian, Mr. Bowerman, is also the busiest librarian in Washington, and for that very reason cheerfully undertook the preparations for your accommodation, the burden of which has been wholly his.

The public library itself is half maintained by the federal government. The libraries wholly so maintained are the libraries of the various departments and bureaus, and the Library of Congress. It is these which in the aggregate constitute, or should constitute, the national library of the United States. In proportion as they do, their distinctive features may be worth a recurrent study. I need not capitulate them. I will only emphasize that in considering the material for serious re-

search available here, it is to be remembered that the Library of Congress is only one collection of nearly thirty; that outside of it there are over a million and a half volumes in collections maintained by the federal government; and that among such collections there are at least three—in agriculture, in geology and in medicine—perhaps preëminent of their kind. A summary description of the whole group is given in the little Handbook compiled for this occasion by the Library Association of the District. Included also are the libraries of various private institutions, of which that at Georgetown particularly contains material of distinction.

All these libraries are, of course, happy in the thought of a visit from you, and each of you. And I have no doubt that, as in the Library of Congress, so in all, the badge of the Association will admit you to the most "reserved" of the collections, and the most confidential of the processes.

Washington has its monuments, its memorials, its associations. It has also within it, or near at hand, natural beauties unusual to a city. If the ordinary tourist finds in such things instruction and stimulus, certainly a librarian should, whose professional life is, through books, so largely a mediation between them and his constituents. The essence and spirit of Washington is not, however, in them. It is not in buildings and collections. It is not in a system of government merely as a system. It is in the human service centering here, and radiating from here: the service of those who are in pursuit of the truths and principles of science, of those who are establishing methods and standards for the utilization of these in practical industry, of those engaged in the framing of laws, in the interpretation of them and in the administration of them. What this service is in a formal way, you know. What it means—its character, and its motives—cannot be known from books, or from a week's visit. For a real understanding of it, we wish we might share with you our years of residence and obser-

vation. We might then get you to see it as we do: a great company of men and women who with sincerity, devotion and predominant unselfishness, are applying a high efficiency to tasks which can profit them personally little or not at all—and we should certainly include in this category the men in the executive and legislative branches who are honestly trying to determine the right course out of a myriad of perplexities.

Distance sometimes inclines to cynicism; a nearer view to optimism. And we hope that one impression at least which you will carry away from even this brief visit will be that of the predominant optimism of those of us who are nearest the operations of government, and most familiar with the motives of those who are conducting them. And our embracing hope is that the resultant of your experiences and impressions as a whole will be a decision similar to that of certain other national organizations—to make Washington your place of meeting at regularly recurrent intervals hereafter.

PRESIDENT ANDERSON: I am sure I speak for the whole Association when I say that by no means the least of the attractions for us here is the Library of Congress, which, under the able administration of Dr. Putnam, has come to be considered by us a model of what a national library should be. It was partly to do honor to the national librarian, the primate of our profession, that we are here. Of course we knew that we should be heartily welcomed before we decided to have this conference here. Nevertheless, we appreciate the cordial greeting Dr. Putnam has just given us; and I echo the wish which I understood him to express, and which a number of our members have expressed several times, that we should get into the habit of meeting in the national capital every five or six years. I think it would be good for us and good for the library movement in this country.

In accordance with our custom it is now incumbent upon me to leave these pleas-

anter functions and deliver my annual address. I am sure you will be grateful to me for the announcement that it is not very long.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

The Tax on Ideas

Russia and the United States are the only powers of the first class which impose a duty on books published beyond their borders. Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Holland, Belgium, Japan, the South African Union, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand impose no such duties. But Spain, Portugal, Italy, Brazil, and some minor countries of the two hemispheres, with Russia and our own country, pursue a less enlightened policy. With the exception of Portugal, the tariff barriers of the countries last named are erected solely or chiefly against foreign books printed in the language of the country concerned—in Spain, for example, against the importation of Spanish books, in Russia against Russian books, and in the United States against the importation of books in the English language. For a nation whose people pride themselves on being advanced and progressive, are we not in strange company?

Though our libraries have the privilege of importing foreign books free of duty, it is proper for us to consider the rights and needs of the general public. The private buyer, the general reader, has no organization to look after his interests in the matter, and no lobby to present his claims to the proper committees in Congress. Before these committees have appeared printers, bookbinders, booksellers and publishers—all with very natural selfish interests to serve—but the general public has been practically unrepresented. The libraries have appeared only now and then, when their privileges have been threatened. Has not the time come when this Association should espouse the cause of the student, the teacher, the scientific investigator, and the general reader of

the world's literature? It is our business to promote the cultural process, as far as we may, through the wide dissemination of books—not American books alone, but books from every quarter of the globe. They have been truly called "the raw materials of every kind of science and art, and of all social improvement." Our libraries have accomplished little when they have imported only *samples* of this raw material. The samples serve the needs of only a small proportion of the reading public, especially in our great centers of population. To the greater part of the reading public these samples are merely tantalizing, and whet their appetites for what they cannot afford to buy for themselves. The interests of the libraries and of the reading public are identical. For both, there should be a free market. For both, an enlightened public policy should provide that the world's books be available at as low a price and with as few hampering restrictions as possible.

There is nothing new in this contention. It is not even the first time that a humble librarian has espoused the cause of the general public on the question of the free importation of books. As long ago as 1846 Charles C. Jewett, at that time librarian of Brown University, afterward president of the first convention of librarians, held in 1853, later librarian of the Smithsonian Institution, and still later first librarian of the Boston public library, printed a pamphlet, entitled "Facts and considerations relative to duties on books, addressed to the Library Committee of Brown University." He maintained that "imperative reasons exist for placing books among articles free from all duty." He then proceeded to give some of those reasons, as follows: "We recognize the importance of education; but students cannot be educated without books, and many of the books needed are not, and cannot be, produced in this country. We recognize, too, the importance of what are commonly termed the learned professions;